

## Love and Stolen Returns.

Helped to an Election by the Devotion of His Sweetheart.

(W. H. Henriksen in Chicago Inter Ocean.)

"Well, father?" said Laura Milburn, as she opened the door for her father at 1 o'clock in the morning.

"What is it?" he asked, pulling off his coat and throwing it across a chair.

"Who is elected?" she asked, half impatiently.

"Oh, Jim Martin, Con McGuire, Adolph Hager and Joe Miller." She frowned slightly and muttered an impatient exclamation.

"Of course, I know they were elected, for they had no opposition, but who was elected sheriff?"

"It will take the official count to decide," he replied, and added maliciously, "with the chances in favor of Hiram Folsom."

"I don't believe it," said Laura, decisively, and walked off to her room.

"She don't believe it, hey?" said Mr. Milburn, as he crept quietly into his own bed to avoid waking his wife.

"She'll see in the morning," said the county clerk of Lacy county, and Laura, his daughter, acted as his deputy, as is sometimes the custom in small counties. Her position in a public office and a disposition naturally willful gave her an air of independence not common with girls of 20, and she had long since come to believe that her way was the best, if not the right way.

She had shown her independence by failing in love with Chris Mapleton, a young mechanic, and although her father did not like Chris, and told her so, she laughed at parental objections and declared her intention of marrying him.

An election for county officers had taken place in Lacy county that day and at her solicitation Chris had been a candidate for sheriff. The contest had not been a political one, for it so happened that Lacy county was overwhelmingly Republican that the Democrats never nominated a ticket.

In making up their slate, as usual, the Republican managers had succeeded in selecting for all positions, except that of sheriff, men who were able to keep down all opposition, so that when Chris announced his candidacy for that position the only contest in the county came to be that between him and Hiram Folsom, the regular nominee.

It had been a spirited contest. Folsom was a comfortable farmer of middle age, a respectable citizen, well qualified for the position. Besides, he was the regular nominee of the party. Chris Mapleton lacked several years of being 30, a great drawback in those days, but he was active, handsome and a good mixer, and he made a house-to-house canvass with the regularity of a politician. He had been successful in winning the support of a large majority.

Benjamin Milburn, as became the county clerk, was a regular party man, and his dislike for Mapleton was increased by what he called his bolt. He used his influence to defeat him, while Laura, his daughter, never allowed a man to leave the clerk's office without an attempt to secure his vote.

She had left her father's office at the usual closing hour on election day, and the first news of consequence which she had received was that which he brought her on his return home at 1 o'clock in the morning. While she left him pretending to doubt the accuracy of the information, yet she was by no means confident of her sweetheart's election. She thought as she went to bed:

"I believe Chris is elected, for if he had been defeated father would have been quick enough to tell me. It may be close, but if the chances were in favor of Folsom, father would have claimed his election flat." With this comforting conclusion she went to sleep.

Before 9 o'clock next morning the court house was filled with people anxious to learn the result of the election for sheriff. Various rumors were afloat as to the closeness of the contest, and the friends of each candidate were claiming a victory. But by 10 o'clock the real state of the case became well understood. The unofficial returns—that is, the reports brought in from each precinct by volunteer messengers, and generally admitted to be substantially correct—gave Mapleton a majority of twenty-seven, but there was a complication. The official returns from Abingdon precinct, in the extreme northeast corner of the county, had disappeared, and as this precinct had even Mapleton's majority of fifty-one, the absence of these returns might defeat him.

The law provided that one of the election judges should convey the returns, inclosed in the ballot box, to the county clerk, and an attempt had been made to do this. Jacob Brewer, one of the judges, had started for the county seat after the vote had been canvassed, having in charge the box containing the returns. He arrived at the county seat about daylight, so drunk he could hardly sit his horse, and he had lost the box. He could not tell when or where he had lost it, and although men had been dispatched to search the road by which he had come they had found nothing, and the feeling that the returns had been destroyed became general.

"What effect will the loss of the Abingdon returns have?" was the question in nearly every mind, and when it was told that it was to be settled by the canvassing board the friends of Mapleton were despondent and the friends of Folsom were correspondingly jubilant.

The canvassing board consisted of the county clerk and two justices of the peace selected by him, and as they were all friends of the regular nominee the result of their action in the case of the missing returns could not be doubted.

Formal announcement was made from the court house steps that at 1 o'clock the canvass of the vote would begin in the court room, and Mapleton and his friends held a hasty meeting to determine upon their course.

"What do you suppose has become of the Abingdon returns?" asked Charlie Leach, a bright young lawyer, who had been retained by Mapleton to represent him before the canvassing board.

"I don't know," said Chris. "If Brewer dropped them on the road some one would have found them and brought them in, unless it was one of my enemies, in which case the box was smashed or destroyed. I am of the opinion, however, that keep one way, old Brewer, got him drunk, and stole the box. In either event the returns will not be produced."

"What can be done?" asked Jack Brown.

"Nothing," said the lawyer, "except to beg for delay. The returns were made in duplicate, but both sets are in the box, so there is absolutely no official record of the result in that precinct."

"A dozen men will swear to the result as announced," said the candidate.

"That might go in the courts," said the lawyer, "but the board, as it is made up, will not consider it. They will canvass the returns that are in, declare the result, and give Folsom the certificate."

"As nothing has been done, then?" asked Mapleton.

"Nothing except to fight for delay, and in the meantime keep up the search for the missing box."

"Twenty men are hunting for it now," said Chris.

"What does Brewer say?" asked Brown.

"He can remember nothing," said Chris, "only that he started with the box and arrived without it."

"At 1 o'clock the canvassing board met in the courtroom. They took their seats behind the clerk's desk, eked out with several tables, and the twenty-one ballot boxes were piled up behind them in charge of a deputy sheriff. The room was filled with people, and inside the bar were several lawyers.

"Gentlemen," said the county clerk, rising, "the hour for opening and canvassing the returns of the county election has arrived, and we shall proceed to perform our duty," and he sat down.

He consulted with his colleagues for a minute, and then said:

"We shall take the precincts in alphabetical order. Mr. Sheriff, hand us the ballot box from Abingdon precinct."

The officer made a pretense of looking at the names printed on the boxes, and replied solemnly: "The Abingdon box is not here."

The county clerk hesitated for a few seconds, and then said: "We shall go on with the canvass." Leach arose.

"May I please the board," he said, "representing Mr. Mapleton, I would ask that this canvass be deferred until day after tomorrow at this hour in order to give my client an opportunity to find the missing returns from Abingdon."

"I object to any delay," said Judge Wallace, the leading lawyer of the city. "I represent Mr. Folsom, and I demand that the canvass proceed, according to law."

Then in a short speech he showed the correctness of his position and declared that the board had no choice but to proceed with the canvass of the returns as declared by the result of the election from the evidence before them. Leach replied, showing the unfairness of such a course and asking for even the shortest delay.

The county clerk, after consulting with his colleagues, announced that the canvass would go on and would be continued until all the returns that were in were examined. Any returns not in when the canvass was closed would not be taken into account. "For such," he announced, solemnly, "is the law."

There was a murmur of disapproval from the audience. Such a law seemed to the average man unfair, but the board proceeded with its work.

"Bartholomew precinct," said the clerk, and the sheriff handed him a wooden box about a foot square labeled with that name.

He opened a bunch of keys the clerk selected one and unlocked the box, and from it took several sealed envelopes, which he passed to the justice, who, after examining the seals critically returned them to him. He tore open one of the envelopes, extracted the tally sheet it contained, and began calling off the figures with which it was covered. The justice, with a large sheet of paper before him, took down the figures as he announced them, calling them back each time.

In a few minutes Bartholomew precinct was canvassed, and Liberty, the next in order, was taken up.

The crowd outside the hall was silent except when some slight change from the unofficial return was announced. Then there was a murmur, a buzz, and sometimes an exclamation.

Leach stood, pad in hand, taking down these charges, hoping for some lucky error that would give his client a chance. But the errors were too small and too well balanced to produce any change, and Leach only continued his work as a matter of course.

Mapleton slipped down to the clerk's office. He thought he would find Laura alone, for everyone else would be in the court room. He found her seated at a desk, writing, when he entered. She looked up with a bright smile and her eyes twinkled as she noticed his dejected appearance.

He dropped into a chair near her and said, dolefully, "They'll count me out."

"There may be some error in the returns," He shook his head.

"Well, don't be cast down," she said, cheerfully. "You can live without the sheriff's office."

"Of course, I can," he said, "but it would be a great help when we get married."

"Oh, yes," she said complacently, "but we can marry without it, you know."

He sighed and thought of the expenses of the campaign.

She laid down her pen and talked to him. She seemed happy, though somewhat nervous, and under her badinage returned were never put in or they have been shouting at the board and at each other. It was several minutes before Chris could get an explanation of the scene, and finally getting hold of one of his friends, Jack Brown, he asked:

"What is that?" he asked. "It seems to come from the court room."

"Go and see," she said impatiently, and he rushed from the office and up the stairs to the court room.

The people were all on their feet and most of them outside the hall. Behind the bar Judge Wallace and Mr. Leach were shouting at the board and at each other. It was several minutes before Chris could get an explanation of the scene, and finally getting hold of one of his friends, Jack Brown, he asked:

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"Hurry up!" shouted several threatening voices.

The deputy sheriff shouted, "Gentlemen, be orderly."

"Shut your head, Sam, or we'll break it for you," said a brawny partisan of Mapleton's.

"We'll have to do it," said the clerk as he noticed the action of the crowd, and, rising, he said, in a trembling voice, "The canvass will proceed."

"Go on, then," said several voices, and the count went on. It took but a few minutes to finish, and the result was declared. Mapleton had a majority of seventy.

In the meantime Leach had whispered something to a number of friends and as soon as the result was announced half a dozen men surrounded the clerk, escorted him to his office, and did not leave him until the certificate of election had been signed, sealed, and mailed to the secretary of state.

"And no more monkey work, Ben," was their warning as they left him.

Laura was busy writing and gave but little attention to the tumult around her.

A week later the Abingdon ballot box was found stranded on the bank of the creek. Inside were the returns, soaked but still legible. The box was brought to the clerk and he received it without comment.

The next day he found the returns from Shannon. They were in a drawer of his desk. He was surprised, and happening to look at his daughter, he saw a twinkle in her eye that told him a story. He swore, but Laura laughed and said:

"What bunglers men are, even in politics."

She resigned her position in a few days to become the wife of the sheriff, and her father came in time to admit that it was all right.

A year later Mrs. Mapleton was talking to her baby. She said: "Your mamma was a very wicked woman, baby, but she could not help it. Bad people were trying to defraud your papa out of the office to which the people had elected him. Your mamma had a key that would unlock the ballot boxes, and she stole the returns from Shannon precinct and hid them so they had to count your mamma in after all. Then when they found the other returns she put the papers she had stolen in your grandpa's drawer. He swore when he found them, for he knew then who had hidden them, and he did not like your papa then. He is glad now that I stole the Shannon returns, for he has become better acquainted with papa and likes him very much. Everybody likes papa, and when you grow to be a man you must be just like him, so that everybody will love you."

The baby's blue eyes looked straight into hers, and she murmured, "I feel better, now, for I have told someone of my sin. I am glad I was wicked enough to do it."

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An immense stock of Shirt Waists to choose from this week at unequalled low prices.

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Glycerine Soap..... **6c**

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